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EXPECTATIONS • ACHIEVEMENTS • DISAPPOINTMENTS • THE FUTURE

The Impact on Maltese Environmental NGOs

by Michael Briguglio



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Ten Years of Malta's EU Membership - The Impact on Maltese Environmental NGOs

by Michael Briguglio

Introduction

This paper investigates the impact of Malta's European Union (EU) accession on Environmental NGOs (ENGOS).

For this purpose, environmental politics in relation to Malta's EU accession are analysed. This is carried out by focusing on a selection of issues involving Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) (land development; climate change; hunting of birds and fishing of 'blue fin' tuna), as well as through data involving interviews with ENGO representatives.

This paper verifies whether EU accession has effected lobbying by ENGOS; whether EU accession has enhanced the empowerment of ENGOS; and whether EU accession has led to the institutionalisation of ENGOS.

Theorising ENGO Empowerment in the EU


The theoretical approach adopted for this study is discourse theory. In this regard, social agents are seen as being involved in articulatory practice through discourse. Nodal points are constructed, partially fixing meaning¹ through empty signifiers.²

In turn, chains of equivalence made up of political alliances can be created. In other words, discourse coalitions are formed, with boundaries between insiders and outsiders, yet also covering-over the differences that exist within such coalitions. Internal differences are thus minimised in opposition to the exterior enemy.³

¹ Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 113.

² Laclau, 1996: 53; Laclau, 2005: 133; Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000: 9.

³ Griggs, 2005: 116.



This can result in hegemonic formations. In this case hegemony is seen as a situation 'in which the management of the positivity of the social and the articulation of diverse democratic demands had achieved a maximum of integration - the opposition situation, in which social negativity brings about the disintegration of every stable system of differences, would correspond to an organic crisis'⁴.

A successful hegemonic project is characterized by relative stability and a widely shared common sense of universalistic ideological representation. In such a context, social agents can be seen as experiencing empowerment.

In turn, empowerment can be substantiated in terms of sensitising, procedural, structural and substantive external impacts.⁵ Sensitising impacts refer to raising consciousness among the public and/or policy elites. Procedural impacts refer to increased democratisation such as access to decision making structures and consultation. Structural impacts have to do with changes in political structures and in political opportunity structures, whilst substantive impacts deal with decisive decisions, changes in legislation, new policies, enforcement and so forth.

In such a context the state is seen as being characterised by the condensation of antagonistic forces within civil society in the construction of hegemonic formations.⁶ Along similar lines, the EU comprises the condensation of antagonistic forces, even within the EU institutions themselves. Civil society actors such as ENGOs can shape EU policy, though they are one actor out of many.

The EU is characterised by a hegemonic process⁷ of Europeanization,⁸ which can also have dislocatory effects, thus resulting in new discursive opportunities. EU accession demonstrates this point. New space is created for antagonism and the articulation of demands with differentiated and uncertain outcomes.

Dominant discourses on economic competitiveness and environmental sustainability and protection, feature prominently in EU politics, though the economic logic does not feature in all EU environmental policies, the Wild Birds and Habitats directive being a case in point. These policies often involve moderate ideologies of ecological modernisation, sustainable development and conservationism.⁹

⁴ Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 189.


⁵ Giugni; 1995; van der Heijden 1999; Carter 2001; Rootes 2007a.

⁶ Poulantzas, 2000: 151.

⁷ Jessop, 2004.

⁸ Börzel and Risse, 2000.

⁹ Baker 2007, Janicke 2008, Jordan 1999.



NGOs within the EU attempt to influence both EU institutions, national governments and the public. National governments tend to be bypassed when the EU is seen as a better gateway to achieve environmental demands.¹⁰

In turn, the EU can enhance the empowerment of NGOs through the creation of hegemonic formations involving nodal points related to NGO discursive constructions.

Moreover, institutionalisation enables NGOs - especially moderate ones - to form broad coalitions and to influence policy making. Yet this could also result in change of NGO structures, co-optation and a strengthening of moderate NGOs at the expense of radical ones. Hence, institutionalisation can be seen as a double-edged sword for the environmental movement.¹¹

Institutionalisation is not necessarily a barrier to the mobilization of protest. The environmental movement is diverse, with various organisations being institutionalized whilst others resisting complete co-optation.¹²

Environmental Politics in Malta

The Maltese political context is characterised by the dominance of the Nationalist and Labour Parties.¹³ Civil society has however played an important role in political influence, for example through the role of the Catholic Church and the so called 'constituted bodies' such as the Malta Employers' Association, The Chamber of Commerce and trade unions. Environmentalism is also present in Maltese politics, both through NGOs and through the Green Party - Alternattiva Demokratika.¹⁴

The 1960s witnessed the birth of Malta's first NGOs, namely Din l-Art Helwa, the Malta Ornithological Society (which eventually became Birdlife Malta), and the Society for the Study and Conservation of Nature (which eventually became Nature Trust).¹⁵ These NGOs mainly focused on issues related to conservationism and to overdevelopment of land,¹⁶ the latter being characterised by the possible vested interests and links between politicians and the construction industry.¹⁷ New NGOs included Żgħażaġh għall-Ambjent (which later became Moviment għall-Ambjent - Friends of the Earth Malta), and finally, in 1989, Malta's Green Party, Alternattiva Demokratika, entered the

¹⁰ Börzel, 2008: 232; Johnston, 2011: 186-7; Dimitrakopoulos and Richardson, 2001, 344-5.

¹¹ Rootes, 2007a: 624.

¹² Rootes, 2007a: 625, 633.


¹³ Baldacchino, 2002.

¹⁴ Briguglio, 2010.

¹⁵ Briguglio and Brown, 2009.

¹⁶ Boissevain and Gatt, 2011.

¹⁷ Boissevain, 1993: 142.



political field, thus increasing the public visibility of environmental issues.¹⁸ The Green Party has won and retained some local council seats, but has not managed to win parliamentary representation, at national or European levels.

In between 1971-87, under a Labour government, there was a lack of environmental planning and legislation, as well as haphazard development characterized by an unruly expansion of the building development areas around Maltese towns and villages. The Nationalist Government (1987-96; 1996-2013) introduced environmental legislation such as the Environment Protection Act of 1991 and drafted a Structure Plan. A Planning Authority and a Ministry for the Environment were set up.

By the turn of the century, Malta was considerably more built up than the European average.¹⁹ Demand for land-use came from several sectors including industry, commerce, tourism, housing, quarrying, waste management and agriculture. Total built-up area increased from 4.5 per cent in 1957 to 21 per cent in 1995, much higher than the European mean of 8 per cent.²⁰ By 2005, this percentage increased to 23 per cent,²¹ even though at the same time around 23 per cent of housing in Malta lay vacant.²²

Friends of the Earth (Malta) identified the main constraints to sustainability, as

‘A general lack of appreciation of the seriousness of environmental degradation, as well as the causes thereof, and the means already available to reduce or counter such degradation... A strong tendency to build lifestyles around the accumulation of material wealth... A high population density and the limitations of space on the island... An over-dependency on the construction industry and the heavy investment in immovable property’.²³

In the meantime, the environmental movement was gaining prominence, and new entrants joined the field such as the radical NGO Moviment Graffiti. Another left-wing NGO, Żminijietna - Voice of the Left - also allied itself with the other NGOs promoting environmental campaigns, which were becoming increasingly common.

Intra-ENG0 alliances also began to appear. Examples of such alliances included the “Front against the Hilton Redevelopment Project” in St Julians, which was formed by activists mainly coming from

¹⁸ Boissevain and Theuma, 1998.


¹⁹ Ragonesi, Manduca, Mallia, Camilleri, 1997.

²⁰ Mallia, 2000: 17.

²¹ National Statistics Office, 2006: 19.

²² Government of Malta, 2002: 49.

²³ Ragonesi, Manduca, Mallia, Camilleri, 1997: 49.



Moviment Graffiti and Friends of the Earth,²⁴ and the “Front Against the Golf Course”, - a broad coalition made up of diverse environmental, social, cultural, religious and political organisations and which successfully stopped the development of a golf course at Tal-Virtù.²⁵

The redevelopment of the Hilton showed all too clearly that ‘The State and land developers form part of a power bloc through which both stand to gain from the exploitation of land. The State gains through the generation of economic growth. Land developers legitimate the exploitation of land through the State Apparatus’.²⁶

To oppose the golf course, the Front successfully articulated a campaign around the themes of agricultural conservation, environmental sustainability and the contestation of legitimacy.²⁷

The victory of the Front Against the Golf Course can therefore be seen as a historic victory within Maltese environmental politics prior to Malta’s EU accession. Similar successes were registered by broad alliances against a leisure complex in Munxar in the mid-1990s,²⁸ a cement plant in Siggiewi and a landfill near Mnajdra temple. Another proposed development - an airstrip in Gozo - was shelved by the Labour Government in 1996 following opposition by environmentalists, but was re-proposed in subsequent years.²⁹

Malta’s 2004 EU accession resulted in the setting up and upgrading of various governmental structures related to the environment, as well as the enactment of more environmental legislation in areas such as air quality assessment and management; freedom of access to information on the environment; pollution caused by the release of certain dangerous substances into the aquatic environment; quality of petrol and diesel fuels; waste management, permits, control and incineration; urban waste water treatment; and the protection of waters against pollution by nitrates.³⁰ Thirty-one special areas of conservation were designated, and ENGOs were assigned the management and administration of these areas.³¹

EU membership was discursively described as being beneficial to Malta’s environment, which possibly meant that ENGOs would be empowered in the process.

²⁴ Briguglio, 1998.

²⁵ Galea, 2011.

²⁶ Briguglio, 1998: 85.

²⁷ Galea, 2011.

²⁸ Boissevain, 2004.

²⁹ Boissevain and Gatt, 2011: 128.

³⁰ Government of Malta, 2002: 89.

³¹ National Commission for Sustainable Development, 2004: 19.



By then, Malta had a wide range of ENGOS, which can be classified as follows:

- Conservationist:** comprising Nature Trust Malta, Birdlife Malta, Din l-Art Ħelwa, Flimkien għall-Ambjent Aħjar, Ramblers' Association Malta and the Biological Conservation Research Foundation;
- Sustainable Development:** which included Friends of the Earth Malta and the Gaia Foundation;
- Local:** made up of the Movement for the Protection of Hondoq, Qui-si-sana and Tigne' Residents' Association and the Committee Against the Proposed Recycling Plant; and
- Radical:** comprising Moviment Graffiti and Żminijietna Voice of the Left.

Some ENGOS, such as the very active Flimkien għall-Ambjent Aħjar (FAA) and Ramblers' Association emerged after Malta's EU accession.

Malta's EU Accession and ENGOS' Lobbying

Malta's EU accession has generally affected the lobbying strategies of ENGOS. EU membership had the dislocatory effect of providing opportunities which were previously unavailable.


For example, lobbying with regard to hunting was significantly influenced by Malta's EU accession in a context of increased regulations and surveillance on this matter. The EU had a hegemonic formation around the Birds Directive and consequently, EU accession had a dislocatory effect 'which disrupted existing national legislation.'³²

Discursive articulation based on the signifier to stop spring hunting in line with the Birds' Directive was carried out by conservationist Birdlife Malta and other ENGOS including Birdlife's European counterparts, and thus a nodal point in relation to the adaptation of EU policy in Malta was created. This was a clear case where an ENGO used EU accession as a gateway for empowerment.

ENGOS therefore experienced increased procedural opportunities through new structures, in relation to an issue with a high degree of sensitization across the EU.³³ At the same time, however, the

³² Briguglio, 2014: 317.

³³ Ibid: 318.



hunting issue remained marred by antagonisms at national and European levels, which, in turn reflected the antagonistic interpretations of the Nationalist Government which governed Malta during the first nine years of membership, pro-hunting and anti-hunting lobbies of EU legislation and a decision by the European Court of Justice on spring hunting in Malta. The 2013 election of a Labour government which sympathized with hunters' claims led to Maltese ENGOs and the Green Party to carry out a campaign for a legally-binding abrogative national referendum on the matter, thus confirming that "despite EU accession, national political factors remain highly influential in the Maltese hunting issue".³⁴

As regards lobbying on the conservation of bluefin tuna which surfaced in 2005, crisis-laden discourse on 'collapse of tuna stocks'³⁵ was articulated by ENGOs, though this was mostly taken up by ENGOs organised at European and global levels, rather than Maltese ENGOs, which 'were not vociferous on the bluefin issue as they were on other matters'.³⁶ Maltese ENGOs active in the field had limited involvement, and greatly relied on the activism of ENGOs organised at European and global levels, which in turn, had mixed results within EU and ICCAT structures. In this case, Malta's EU membership was influential in the provision of civil society and institutional gateways,³⁷ even though EU policy formation in this area is not as well-developed as, say, the Birds Directive.

Different Maltese ENGOs were active on climate change, and they also relied on lobbying by EU and global ENGOs in the various aspects connected to this issue. The institutionalisation of the issue in both EU and global fora provided a gateway for lobbying beyond national frontiers. Despite the different ideological claims made by different ENGOs, what united them was their partial surrender in terms of identity,³⁸ which resulted in a hegemonic nodal point calling for targets to reduce CO² emissions.³⁹

Discursive opportunities were also created for ENGOs opposing various development projects and policies, including the "land rationalisation" issue that gained prominence between 2006 and 2010. This issue featured the extension of building development boundaries. ENGOs used the EU as a further resort to express their opposition to what they deemed as overdevelopment. However, the European Commission did not conclude that the government had infringed the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive.

³⁴ Ibid, 2014: 296.


³⁵ Briguglio, 2013b. 56.

³⁶ Ibid: 57.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Laclau and Mouffe, 1985.

³⁹ Briguglio, 2013a.



Thus, Maltese ENGOS tend to use the EU as a gateway for empowerment, and consider lobbying at an EU level as being of major importance especially when lobbying at a national level is unsuccessful.⁴⁰ Despite the fact that ENGOS did not always find support from EU institutions or backing through legislation, they acquired more lobbying tools as a result of Malta's EU accession.

However, one cannot conclude that lobbying at the EU-level is necessarily more effective than lobbying at a national level. Chains of equivalence and nodal points on specific development issues were already being formed prior to Malta's EU accession, with considerable sensitizing, and at times substantive, impacts, as was the case with the successful campaign against the development of a golf course in Rabat which was referred to earlier. Besides, following Malta's EU accession, the relatively few substantive impacts related to development projects, including stopping them, seemed to have no relationship to Malta's EU accession, but had to do more with local and national political factors. A case in point is the successful campaign against the development of a carpark in Qui-si-sana gardens, Sliema, which is referred to below.⁴¹

Malta's EU Accession and the Empowerment of ENGOS

As has been argued here, EU accession had an impact on Malta's environmental politics, and empowerment of ENGOS, whose effectiveness was generally enhanced - especially through the possibility of using the EU as a further resort, not to mention the influence of the EU *acquis* on national structures and legislation.

However, this was an uneven process which reflected not only a plurality of over-determining factors, nodal points and hegemonic formations, but also different types of ENGOS.


Maltese ENGOS with different ideologies have different perceptions of the factors related to empowerment. When interviewed on EU empowerment around five years after Malta's EU accession, Conservationist ENGOS were the most optimistic, followed by sustainable developmental, radical and local ENGOS respectively.⁴²

The fact that local ENGOS were the least optimistic as regards their empowerment through EU could be related to the fact that their grievances are not given prominence in EU policy. Issues related to overdevelopment and construction - have more to do with national policy, despite the existence of some European legislative tools.

⁴⁰ Börzel, 2008: 232; Johnston, 2011: 186-7; Dimitrakopoulos and Richardson, 2001, 344-5.

⁴¹ Briguglio, 2013a: 285.

⁴² Briguglio, 2010.



In one instance among others where local ENGOS were successful - namely the blocking of a proposal to construct a car park and shopping centre beneath the Qui-si-sana public garden in Sliema - the support of representatives of the then ruling Nationalist Party was the over-determining factor.⁴³ This revealed splits within State structures, which in turn are characterised by condensation of antagonistic forces.⁴⁴

In the national context, it is important to note that the direct adversaries of local ENGOS come from the politically-influential construction industry. Indeed, in most instances, the discourses of economic growth and neo-liberal ideology have prevailed.

Indeed, 'with respect to development of land, EU accession is not sufficient to empower ENGOS, since this process is mediated with other over determining factors'.⁴⁵ These include the symbiotic relationship between the State and the construction industry in terms of economic growth, neo-liberal ideology and a Southern European context of patronage and obligation.⁴⁶

Hence,

'(t)he case of local ENGOS shows that being a moderate ENGO is therefore not enough to claim empowerment. Their moderatism has not been a gateway to empowerment as much as it has been for other moderate ENGOS'.⁴⁷

In sum, Localism is not so influential at EU level. The change in Government in 2013 did not seem to improve things in this regard, and if anything confirms the strong influence of national factors in the politics of land development. Indeed, the Labour Government is carrying out revisions to increase building heights, is actively supporting land reclamation and considering forms of development projects (including the resurrected Gozo airstrip proposal) and is also reported to be considering the 'tweaking' of development boundaries, to the chagrin of ENGOS.⁴⁸

As regards the fishing of bluefin tuna, a relative lack of activism of Maltese ENGOS and an absence of an environmentalist hegemonic formation within the EU were detrimental to environmentalist demands. The nodal point which combined neo-liberal ideology with the "national interest", which, in turn, was supported by big business and by the Nationalist and Labour parties, prevailed. Hence,

⁴³ Ibid. 278-285.


⁴⁴ Poulantzas: 2000: 151.

⁴⁵ Briguglio, 2012: 279.

⁴⁶ Ibid.292.

⁴⁷ Briguglio, 2010: 273.

⁴⁸ Debono, 2014.



NGOs were unsuccessful in creating a hegemonic formation to stop the fishing of bluefin tuna until stocks recover.⁴⁹

Conversely, EU accession had strong influence on ENGO empowerment in relation to climate change. The 'Reduce CO₂ emissions' signifier sensitized the political agenda in both the EU and Malta, and reflected substantive, procedural and structural impacts. Indeed, Malta adopted binding EU targets on CO₂ emissions. The nodal point around the political discourse on climate change was articulated in a manner that was mainly in synch with moderate ideologies of sustainable development and ecological modernization.⁵⁰

In this regard, ideological proximity to and, at times, ideological alignment with EU policy can create hegemonic formations as in the case of climate change, particularly if the issue is not much over determined by Maltese political adversarial forces.

Whether ENGO empowerment in this area is long-lived, remains to be seen. Indeed, Malta's progress on reducing CO₂ emissions has been quite slow, and questions are being raised as to whether Malta can reach its established targets by 2020.

In this regard, the 2009 Copenhagen Summit on climate change seemed to represent a cut-off point dividing agreed EU targets and actual implementation. The Copenhagen summit took place in the context of the financial crisis which had tremendous impact on many societies, such as an increase in unemployment, soaring levels of public debt, and social inequalities. Such impacts influenced Governments to prioritise a range of generally neo-liberal economic policies to avert the crisis, at the price of scaling down climate change targets.

At the same time, however, the EU was predicting that it would surpass its 2020 targets, with total emissions being projected at 24.5 per cent below base year (1990) levels.⁵¹ Malta was not among the European CO₂ reducers' high achievers, and a report on its 2020 targets stated that only 1.4 per cent of energy was coming from renewable sources, reflecting limited progress made since 2005. Some progress was however achieved with respect to energy efficiency measures.⁵²


In the meantime, after almost 25 years of Nationalist Party rule, the Labour Party won a landslide electoral victory in 2013, and the new Government announced that in line with its electoral promise for lower utility bills and a shift from heavy fuel oil to gas, it was indeed beginning the process of

⁴⁹ Briguglio, 2013a.

⁵⁰ Briguglio, forthcoming.

⁵¹ The Times, 2014a.

⁵² The Times, 2014b.



switching to gas for the generation of electric power.⁵³ The implementation of this electoral promise was mired in political controversy, and it has to be seen how this will affect the implementation of Malta's policies and targets on climate change in general, and the empowerment of ENGOs in particular. In the meantime, the new Labour government announced that its renewable energy plans will be entirely focusing on solar energy, whilst excluding wind energy.⁵⁴

The climate change issue therefore raises questions on the durability of hegemonic formations, particularly when it comes to the implementation of established policy at national level. At the same time, one cannot underestimate the influence of European and global factors on implementation.

The National Referendum on Hunting

Earlier reference was made to the referendum held on 11 April 2015 to abrogate the law which permits spring hunting. This was narrowly won by the hunting lobby which obtained just 50.4% of the vote with a majority of just 2,200 votes in a turnout of just under 75 per cent. The hunting issue did not result in a Maltese anti-hunting hegemonic formation, but it did provide ENGOs with comparatively strong legislative, ideological and policy gateways within the EU, particularly for Birdlife Malta, which became more strongly institutionalised. ENGO empowerment was therefore enhanced through EU accession⁵⁵. This issue was not characterised by conflicts revolving around class or economic interests. Yet, the Maltese pro-hunting lobby was an organised and influential political constituency, and was influential on both the Nationalist and Labour parties, within a nationalistic, traditionalistic and confrontational nodal point. Besides, as stated earlier, by resorting to a national referendum on hunting the environmentalists confirmed the importance of national politics even in areas characterised by strong EU legislation.⁵⁶

Sensitizing and Procedural Impacts

In relation to the specific issues referred to in this paper, an analysis of ENGO empowerment in terms of sensitizing, procedural, structural and substantive impacts confirm van der Heijden's argument that impacts of the environmental movement are increasingly sensitizing and procedural.⁵⁷

As regards sensitizing impacts, these can vary, despite ENGO articulations which partially fix meaning through nodal points. For example, environmentalist claims on the bluefin tuna issue did not really


⁵³ Briguglio and Pace, 2013.

⁵⁴ Camilleri, 2014.

⁵⁵ Briguglio, 2014.

⁵⁶ Briguglio, 2015.

⁵⁷ Van Der Heijden, 1999.



sensitize Maltese authorities, despite the Maltese press coverage of activism of European and global ENGOs. Perhaps the low-key activism of ENGOs in Malta was interpreted by political elites as being a minor political threat to them. Conversely, ENGO activism on bird hunting was constant and largely helped sensitize the Maltese public and EU institutions. As regards climate change, ENGOs had an important sensitizing role. It should also be kept in mind that prior to EU accession, ENGOs already had sensitizing impacts - particularly in areas such as land development.

With regard to procedural impacts, one can note an increased degree of consultation by EU and State bodies with ENGOs, increased access to environmental information, and the fact that on certain issues, the European Commission relied on information provided by ENGOs.⁵⁸ ENGOs themselves -particularly those with ideologies of conservationism and sustainable development - have tended to emphasize the importance of state cooperation and civil society participation as the main sources of empowerment, together with other factors such as the possibility of access to financial resources. On the other hand, radical and local ENGOs, which were least close to the Maltese State and EU structures, also tended to be least close to other ENGOs.⁵⁹

Structural impacts included changes both within state (or public) organizations and within the environmental movement. As regards changes within the former, in areas such as climate change, development policy, hunting and trapping, the consultation with ENGOs analysed above was institutionalised within State structures, and EU membership played an important role in this respect. This also included access to EU institutions which were previously unavailable. As regards changes within the environmental movement, four new and very active ENGOs (two conservationists, two local) were formed following Malta's EU accession.⁶⁰


In respect of measures which had to be carried out because they were mandated by EU membership - the impacts were mixed. As shown earlier, even though climate change and hunting were both characterised by EU-wide legislation, they were still dogged by antagonisms and over-determining factors in terms of how to implement them locally. Therefore, even though EU accession leads to new legal frameworks, political gateways and opportunities for civil society to pursue its goals, these interact with national factors, in what is described as 'multi-level governance'.⁶¹ Thus, a state 'cannot unilaterally craft legislation that has clear implications on the other member states of the EU, and on

⁵⁸ Briguglio, 2013a.

⁵⁹ Briguglio, 2010.

⁶⁰ Briguglio, 2013a.

⁶¹ Baldacchino, 2014.



the EU itself' but, on the other hand, EU legislation is given particular national flavours especially in relation to implementation.⁶²

Malta's EU Accession and the Institutionalisation of ENGOS

Maltese ENGOS have mixed views on institutionalisation and its effect on the environmental movement. What is rather evident is that the relatively more empowered conservationist ENGOS generally claim not to rely on self-financing (as opposed to other forms of income), to have a relatively positive relation with the Maltese state, EU institutions and ENGOS. Conservationists also claim to be politically non-affiliated.⁶³ On the other hand, the least empowered and least institutionalised radical and local ENGOS have acquired by some important characteristics. This includes being closer to Malta's Green Party - Alternattiva Demokratika - itself being characterised by lack of empowerment and institutionalisation. In terms of ideology,

'Radical ENGOS.... claim radical ideologies, whilst local ENGOS are combating on a least favourable terrain, because their ideology is not a main environmental ideology of the EU and because EU directives do not cover much of their concerns. Besides, the direct adversaries of local ENGOS hail from the construction industry which has disproportionate power in Maltese politics. The case of local ENGOS shows that being a moderate ENGO is therefore not enough to claim empowerment. Their moderatism has not been a gateway to empowerment as much as it has been for other moderate ENGOS.'⁶⁴

At the same time, however, institutionalisation does not necessarily mean that an ENGO is co-opted into passive submission to State power and dominant ideologies. The case of conservationist ENGO Birdlife Malta is striking in this regard.


This ENGO witnessed increased empowerment and institutionalisation through Malta's EU accession. Its affiliation with Birdlife International enhanced its lobbying avenues in the European Parliament and the European Commission. Birdlife is officially consulted by the European Commission and it also forms part of Malta's state-appointed Ornis committee which oversees hunting and trapping. It benefitted from EU and state funding and from the management of public land, though this was also experienced by other conservationist and sustainable developmental ENGOS.⁶⁵ It witnessed a change in internal organisational structures and became more professional and conventional, following a

⁶² Ibid. p.13.

⁶³ Briguglio 2010: 271-3.

⁶⁴ Briguglio 2010: 273.

⁶⁵ Briguglio 2014.



route similar not only to its mother organisations, but also to that of global ENGOs such as Friends of the Earth (FoE), World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and Greenpeace.⁶⁶

On the other hand, Birdlife Malta remained consistent in its antagonism with the hunting lobby and did not shy away from criticising Government decisions, to the point of being a key campaigner in the coalition for a national referendum on spring hunting. Hence, Birdlife can be seen as an example of ENGOs that ‘remain vital and resist the complete co-optation that would render them toothless’.⁶⁷

Hence, EU accession did have an effect on institutionalisation of ENGOs, though moderate and radical environmentalism remain symbiotically related to each other through a ‘creative tension’, sometimes even within the same ENGO itself⁶⁸.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that EU accession has generally enhanced the empowerment of Maltese ENGOs, but this process was uneven. It was also combined with other over-determining factors and depended on different issues and on different types of ENGO.

ENGOS had greater access to opportunities that were unavailable prior to Malta’s EU accession. The construction or otherwise of hegemonic formations linked to the empowerment of ENGOs was related to sensitizing, procedural, structural and substantive impacts.

Empowerment through hegemonic formations was not common, but ENGOs were successful in constructing nodal points and in benefitting from different types of impacts, especially procedural and sensitizing ones. As Malta enters its second decade of EU membership, sensitizing impacts are increasing in prominence. Indeed, in June 2015, the biggest ever environmental protest was held in Malta, in reaction to a Government-sponsored development proposal in an Outside Development Zone (ODZ) site.⁶⁹ Organised by the newly-founded citizens’ movement named ‘Front for the Protection of ODZ’, it was a strong sign that in European Malta, the environmental movement is here to stay.

⁶⁶ Van der Heijden, 1999; Carter, 2001; Rootes, 1999, 2007b.


⁶⁷ Rootes, 2007a: 633.

⁶⁸ Carter, 2001: 147.

⁶⁹ Borg Micallef, 2015.

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